



DIANA M. BONTÁ, R.N., Dr.P.H.
Director



GRAY DAVIS
Governor

SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS) FACT SHEET

1) What is SARS?

SARS is a new respiratory illness. It is characterized by fever greater than 100.4°F, headache, an overall feeling of discomfort, body aches and, in some people, mild respiratory symptoms. After two to seven days, a person with SARS may develop a dry cough and experience difficulty breathing. Some patients may require intensive care including mechanical respiration.

2) When was SARS first identified in California?

SARS was first identified in California during March 2003.

3) What causes SARS?

Scientists have identified a previously unrecognized coronavirus in patients with SARS. This new coronavirus is believed to be the cause of SARS. Other infectious agents are still under investigation as potential causes.

4) How is SARS spread?

The main mode of transmission is close person-to-person contact. When someone who is sick with SARS coughs or sneezes, droplets contaminate objects or persons nearby. Coming in contact with these droplets and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth allows the virus to enter your body. It is possible that SARS can also be spread through the air or by other yet unknown ways.

5) Who is at risk for SARS?

Nearly all cases of SARS in California and the United States have occurred among travelers arriving from parts of the world hit hard by SARS. Those areas include mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. A few cases have been the result of close contact between SARS infected patients, family members, and health care workers. Currently, there is no evidence that SARS is spreading more widely among residents in California or the United States.

6) How can I protect myself against SARS?

There are some common sense measures that you can take to prevent the spread of SARS that also apply to many infectious diseases. The most important is frequent hand washing with soap and water or use of alcohol-based hand rubs. In addition, you should avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unclean hands and encourage people around you to cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.



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www.consumerenergycenter.org/flex/index.html

7) Are there any travel restrictions related to SARS?

At this time there are no travel restrictions in place that are directly related to SARS. However, a federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) travel advisory recommends that individuals who are planning nonessential or elective travel to mainland China, Hong Kong, or Taiwan may wish to postpone their trip until further notice.

8) What should I do if I think I have SARS?

If you are ill with a fever greater than 100.4°F (>38.0°C) and have also developed a cough or difficulty breathing, you should consult a health care provider. To help your health care provider make a diagnosis, tell him or her about any recent travel to regions where cases of SARS have been reported and whether you were in contact with a recently arriving traveler from these areas who had these symptoms.

9) What is the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) doing about SARS?

CDHS has a long history of successful disease control efforts using public health surveillance, epidemiology, and laboratory science. Our recent efforts in preparing for bioterrorist threats have enhanced our ability to respond to emerging threats such as SARS.

CDHS is working in partnership with the CDC, local health departments, health care providers, and the media in a statewide effort to address the threat of SARS and keep the people of California informed. Specific actions that CDHS has taken include the following:

- Activated the Health Alert Network to provide updated timely information on SARS to local health departments.
- Coordinated on a daily basis with staff from the CDC.
- Committed medical experts on epidemiology, disease control, infectious diseases, and public health surveillance to coordinate California's response to SARS.
- Provided ongoing assistance via clinical and epidemiologic teams to local health departments investigating possible cases of SARS in California.
- Ensured that local health departments, health care providers, and hospitals have the latest information and are following appropriate infection control guidelines.
- Communicated daily with local health departments on laboratory testing and follow-up with patients and their families.
- Assured that SARS patients are following isolation requests.
- Developed SARS infection control guidelines for physician offices, outpatient clinics, and hospitals.
- Coordinated extensive specimen collection and conducted laboratory testing of clinical specimens from SARS patients to rule out the presence of other diseases.
- Implemented rapid detection, rapid isolation, and infection control measures in hospital and household settings as effective SARS containment methods.
- Published on the CDHS Web site a daily update of the current SARS case count and translations of SARS information in Chinese and Vietnamese.
- Developed a California SARS information line for the general public in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese.
- Provided regular information on SARS incidence and science to the media and state policymakers.
- Consulted with the University of California, Office of the President, in the development of system-wide guidelines concerning SARS for persons traveling to or from SARS-affected areas.

For more information on SARS in California, please go to <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/dcdc/disb/sars.htm> or call (800) 550-5234 for English/Spanish, (800) 750-2858 for Chinese/Vietnamese, or (800) 550-5281 for TDD.

NOTE: Portions of this document were adapted from guidelines issued by the CDC.